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Why the pope has taken control of the Knights of Malta

The Vatican clashes with an ancient chivalric order

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BY J.H.

ON FEBRUARY 2nd, Pope Francis appointed Archbishop Angelo Becciu as his special delegate to the Order of the Knights of Malta, an exclusive, centuries-old Roman Catholic fellowship. He told him to collaborate with the Order's acting head for the "reconciliation between all its members" and to work for it "spiritual and moral renewal". The letter in which he gave these instructions completed a

virtual takeover of the Order that began on January 24th when the pope forced the resignation of the order's grand master, a 67 year-old Briton, Matthew Festing. What is going on?

Popes have occasionally sent representatives in to crack the whip over monastic orders suspected of veering from the doctrinal straight-and-narrow. But the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, which defended pilgrims to the Holy Land during the Crusades, is an order of chivalry. And a singular one. Like countries, the Order has sovereignty (its knights having previously ruled Malta). Yet it no longer has territory beyond its headquarters on the fashionable Via Condotti in Rome. From there it dispatches ambassadors and issues stamps, coins and even

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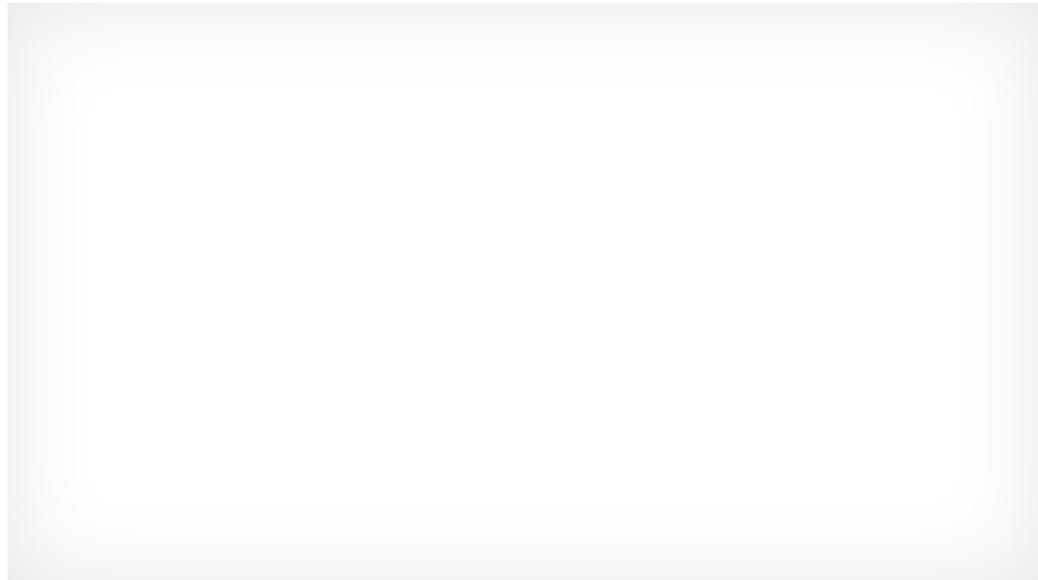
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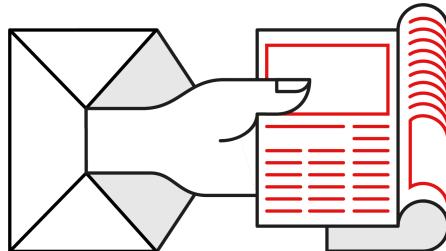
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